TRAI) are going to be progressively reduced. On this account, no problems are likely to be faced under the licensing fee structure of NTP-99 which provides for payment of licence fee in the form of revenue share (as against the earlier fixed licence fee structure).

The downward tariff trends, would also benefit the consumer, push demand for telephones in the rural areas and thus effectively serve the objective of improving tele-density and rural penetration under NTP-99 regime.

Termination of licenses, and invocation of Bank Guarantees would lead to immediate and long drawn out litigation by current licensees. On the other hand, the new revenue sharing regime in NTP-99 would enhance competition by bringing in multiple operators, giving them flexibility to adjust in future to fast changing technologies and tariff changes, lead to induction of more number of players in the field and offer lower tariffs and better quality of service to the consumer. Once the growth of the sector is ensured, the revenue streams will also be more healthy and the Government will be in a better position to realize revenues due to it. Public interest would, therefore, be better served if the existing licensees were allowed to migrate to the New Telecom Policy-1999 regime.

The uniform application of NTP-99 all over the country would ensure growth of telecom sector which is a vehicle for information technology and will fulfil the vision of India to be an IT superpower.

Financial Autonomy to TRAI

476. DR. ALLADI P. RAJKUMAR: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has sought financial autonomy;

(b) if so, the reasons given by them; and

(c) the reaction of Government thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF

COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI TAPAN SIKDAR): (a) No, Sir. There is no such request pending at present.

(b) and (c) Do not arise in view of (a) above.

New Telephone Connections in the Rural and Hilly Areas of Meghalaya

477. SHRI ONWARD L. NONGTDU: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether there are proposals to provide new telephone connections in the rural and hilly areas in the State of Meghalaya;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) the number of villages so far provided with public telephone facilities in the state; and

(d) the time by which the telephone facilities are likely to be granted to the rest of the villages in the State?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI TAPAN SIKDAR): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. About 2500 telephones are proposed to be provided by the end of 9th Five Year Plan.

(c) and (d) Telephone facilities have been provided in 1177 villages so far. Government plans are to provide Village Public Telephone facility in the remaining 4452 villages progressively by March, 2002 depending upon availability of adequate resources.

Electronic Telephone Exchanges in North-Eastern Region

478. SHRI PRAKANTA WARISA: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is any proposal under Government's consideration to set up new electronic telephone exchanges in the NER;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the effective measures being taken or proposed to be taken by Government in this regard?